

A REEF in TIME

The Full Story of the Monospar Croydon's Australia Flight and of the Crew's Escape

By F. F. CROCOMBE

IT is a matter of past history, now, that the initial attempt of the Monospar Croydon to make a fast flight to Australia ended abruptly at Karachi. I was sent out from England to investigate the reason and found that a particularly bad landing at Bushire had caused the fastenings to pull out in one of the fuselage verticals at the rear end. A temporary repair had enabled the aircraft to proceed as far as Karachi, where there were means for doing the work properly. Here the Imperial Airways engineers extended to us all available facilities, but the work took far longer than anticipated, so that what would have taken days at home ran into weeks.

A series of test flights were made when the machine was again serviceable, and it was plain from the results that there was nothing to prevent the projected flight to Australia from being proceeded with. At the same time, the delay had been such that Lord Sempill could no longer spare the time to go on, so I joined the crew in his stead, with Mr. H. Wood as the sole pilot. It was our intention to proceed to Australia, where we had important demonstration work to do, by relatively easy stages, treating it as a development flight. This latter, of course, was the original project, it being very desirable to know how the machine reacted to varying weather conditions the world over, and under as wide a range of aerodrome conditions as possible, so that the air line operator might profit in production aircraft of the type. We knew that the machine was fast, but wished to show tangible evidence of performance over an air route rather than over a speed course; we knew it had a marked degree of directional stability and that its longitudinal stability was positive, but we wished to pit it against whatever meteorological mixture the tropics had in store for us. Our wish was granted.

The table on the next page gives the itinerary and performance from Karachi onwards and it is important to note that we flew entirely under cruising conditions at, or just below, 75 per cent. power, according to the altitude. The times quoted are from the moment of opening the throttles for take-off to the moment when the machine came to rest at the end of the landing run, and thus are honest-to-goodness block-to-block figures.

The high spot of the outward

Mr. F. F. Crocombe, designer of the Monospar Croydon and author of this article, snapped at Waterloo on his return from the coral reef.



journey was undoubtedly a monsoon storm over the Bay of Bengal. Our meteorological information from Calcutta had been reasonably promising and we were cheerfully going through small patches of rain cloud, well out over the Bay, when we went into a cloud front which suddenly appeared ahead, and struck what seemed to be a solid wall of water. There was no escape; we went in at 4,000 ft. and tried all altitudes in vain efforts to free ourselves. I had the grim satisfaction of seeing the "minute" hand of the Kollsman altimeter perform prodigies of ascent and descent which I could hardly believe possible. Of course, we were flying completely blind and there were numerous occasions when disturbances were so fast and furious that each of several fundamental instruments was recording something different, while one's own senses provided yet a different answer.

After hitting the roof several times, the engineer and

The Beginning: The Monospar Croydon (two 400 h.p. Pratt and Whitney Wasp Juniors) at Hanworth shortly before the start of the journey. Standing in front are the original crew, Lord Sempill (second from left) and Messrs. Gilroy, Wood and Davies.

